

# VIEWPOINT

## Obstacles That Interfere with Believers from Islam Easily Joining Adventist Churches

By Bruce L. Bauer

What impression do visitors to Adventist churches have as they come into our faith communities week after week? How would Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and even Christians from Orthodox or Catholic backgrounds view an Adventist worship service? What would followers of Islam think if they entered one of our churches on a Sabbath morning? This short reflections paper lists some of the challenges and obstacles faced when witnessing to spiritual Muslims in the West.

A couple of years ago I spent a weekend in a major city in the United States visiting a mosque and attending an afternoon pre-

sentation on the prophet Muhammad. I also had the opportunity of talking with people interested in reaching out to the Muslim community with the goal and purpose of building bridges that would enable the Seventh-day Adventist Church to witness and introduce Muslims to a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. However, after seeing, visiting, and reflecting on the situation in the Muslim community I have come to the following conclusion: Adventist churches are not conservative enough to be bridges to the Muslim community. I have reached this conclusion for the following reasons.

1. While visiting the mosque I picked up a Qur'an that had both the Arabic and English translation in it. As I was turning to leave the bookstore the young lady asked if the Qur'an had Arabic in it. When I said it did, she asked me to handle the Qur'an reverently, to make sure that I washed my hands before touching the Arabic script, to make sure that I had not visited the bathroom without washing, and to never place the Holy Qur'an on the ground or



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floor. Muslims still have a deep respect for the sacred, and are extremely careful not to place the Qur'an on the floor—hence the Qur'an stands that are used to keep the Qur'an off the floor in all mosques. Muslims would also be horrified if someone wrote or underlined passages in the Qur'an, and they would never place any object on top of the Qur'an. In contrast, at many Adventist churches the Holy Bible is treated much more casually. Bibles are often placed on the floor if the pew is crowded, the Bible is thumped and waved around, and is often placed under a stack of other books or literature.

2. At the afternoon lecture on the prophet Muhammad the speaker always referred to any of the prophets of the Old Testament and even to Jesus with the phrase "Peace be upon Him." In contrast many within Adventism refer to the prophets in a casual way, often even think of Jesus as their buddy, and generally have a lack of respect for the sacred. Westerners have become so casual that many have lost any sense of the holy, and hence reverence in churches is largely lacking having been replaced with talking, joking, and discussing topics that have nothing to do with the sacred.

3. Most mosques and Muslim assemblies segregate the sexes with at the least women sitting on one side and the men on the other. In contrast to this, in most Adventist churches not only do families sit together, but often the youth sit separate from their

families with boy friends and girl friends sitting together in worship services and often acting as if that sacred time was just another get together time with touching, hand holding, and arms draped around each other.

4. When you visit a mosque you are met with a sign that says, "Women, please dress modestly," and nearby there are extra head scarves for any woman who does not have one. Muslim women would not enter a place of worship without having their head covered, and being modestly clothed. In contrast, at a local Adventist church on Sabbath I saw women up front with short skirts, low necklines, and exposed arms and legs—and this in the winter when people are much more modestly covered than in the warmer months.

5. When visiting a mosque there is a simple beauty, but with no pictures of people on the walls, no depictions of Allah, Muhammad, or any other prophet. In contrast, in Adventist churches the children's Sabbath School rooms are full of depictions of Jesus, felt sets depicting the disciples and many other Bible characters, and often pictures in the church of all the pastors who have served in that area. The pictures of people, prophets, and other religious settings would generally be offensive to most Muslims.

When considering whether or not a church or a group of people are able to be bridges for the gospel one usually thinks in terms of that group giving up their

comfortable way, doing everything in their power to eliminate every possible stumbling block that might keep the group being focused on for outreach from being uncomfortable, and being willing to take on as much of the identity of those being reached out to in order to practice incarnational ministry. I wonder if the members of Adventist churches in most if not all parts of the world would be willing to be incarnational in the areas mentioned in the points above. Would whole churches be willing to take on the very conservative ways of the Muslim community? Would Adventist members

liberal in lifestyle issues in order to hear the gospel.

This leaves us with the challenge of finding an alternative way to witness to Muslims without the expectation that they would be easily assimilated into the existing Adventist communities. What form or shape such alternative houses of faith and worship for those who become believers in Jesus Christ would take is a matter for those leading the outreach to grapple with and create.

There are many other distinct people groups in our world who have cherished cultural customs

**No group of people should be forced to become liberal in lifestyle issues in order to hear the gospel.**

be willing to change how they do church and how they portray God and Jesus in children's Sabbath Schools? Would Adventist young people in those churches be willing to become as conservative in their relationships with the opposite sex as is found in the Muslim communities? I am afraid that the answer to these questions is "No" so we are left with the untenable situation where those we wish to evangelize would be faced with becoming much more liberal in many lifestyle areas than is normal and dear to the Muslim community in order to fit into existing Adventist churches. No group of people should be forced to become

and practices that do not go against biblical principles that would make it difficult for them to easily assimilate into existing Adventist church groups. Are we as a church willing and able to provide access to the gospel without also asking that they give up areas of their culture that are important to them? Are we willing to "go" rather than asking them to "come?" May God give wisdom and guidance in seeking strategies and methods that would allow and encourage large numbers of Muslims and other unreached people groups to come into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.